

STAT

**Page Denied**

# Over the hearings, Vietnam's shadow

By Robert Timberg  
Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — Echoes of the Vietnam War in the Iran-contra affair, barely audible when the story first broke some six months ago, have become more insistent as the complex tale unfolds before congressional investigators.

The American experience in Vietnam and neighboring Laos, where the United States concurrently conducted a secret war, has been singled out by the two leadoff witnesses

in the Iran-contra hearings as explaining in part their motives and those of other central players.

One of the witnesses, former National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane, also cited Vietnam and its aftermath as contributing to the problems of conducting foreign policy in the years since the American involvement there ended in 1975.

Mr. McFarlane raised the Vietnam issue most forcefully Tuesday. Clearly troubled that his testimony might be damaging to Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, he said the ex-

NSC aide's view of his liaison role with the contras was filtered through his experiences in Vietnam.

In particular, he suggested that Colonel North's actions in support of the Nicaraguan rebels, or contras, were conditioned by his Vietnam service and a belief, prevalent among veterans of that war, that the military effort was fatally undercut by civilian leaders.

"He is quite cynical about government," said Mr. McFarlane, an ex-

See VIETNAM, 13A, Col. 1

## Behind public justifications looms the shadow of Vietnam

VIETNAM, from 1A

Marine and Vietnam veteran himself. "Ollie is a man that is a veteran of an experience in Vietnam — of which I was very conscious and, I think, not uncommon to the experience of many people — that is, a situation that anyone who exposes himself to loss of life, his own, has to deal with.

"And that is, is it worth it? And for him, it was an easy determination that, yes, it was, because there were enough daily shows of evidence by Vietnamese people — young and old, children, others — of their satisfaction that he was there. And yet, that personal justification was in very sharp tension with the reality that we were losing."

In the wake of his Vietnam service, Colonel North had to deal with his belief that the American withdrawal resulted in "tens of thousands" of Vietnamese deaths, Mr. McFarlane said.

"And I think for him, when it became a matter of association with the contra movement, that it was again a circumstance where we had made a commitment to people that he could see we were just about to break, and that the bottom-line consequence of that would be the death of a lot of people — contras — and that he couldn't be party to that," he said.

A few weeks earlier, in an interview with Barbara Walters on the ABC show "20/20," Mr. McFarlane had made a similar point.

"I think . . . that in a year's time a curious and haunting factor that will come out in this episode is the Vietnam War," he said. "And I think it should. But it is a factor in shaping Colonel North's actions."

Asked to elaborate, he said, "For

people who went through that, and Colonel North surely did, you come away with the profound sense of very intolerable failure. That is, a government must never give its word to people who may stand to lose their lives, and then break faith.

"And I think it's possible that in the last year we've seen a commitment made to human beings in Nicaragua that is being broken."

Asked about those comments in testimony last week, retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, a veteran of Vietnam and the secret war in Laos who is deeply enmeshed in the Iran-contra affair, said he shared the belief "that we can't keep breaking faith with people around the world."

"We've done it too many times," he said. "Of course I was conditioned by my previous experiences. None of us who participated in that conflict in Southeast Asia felt very good about the ending. . . ."

MAR 22 1987

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/19 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000706730001-1

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 1987

THE SUN

PERSPECTIVE / 3C

## Retired Air Force general deals in rattan furniture--and sometimes other things

By Robert Timberg

Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

Here in this small Air Force town on the Florida panhandle that until a year ago proudly promoted itself as the "Home of the Sonic Boom," there is a low-slung cinder-block store whose owner sells rattan furniture from Thailand but sometimes gets calls from people wanting to buy fighter squadrons.

The proprietor is Harry C. Aderholt, a gruff retired Air Force brigadier general whom everyone calls Hienie. He can't remember for sure how he got the nickname and doesn't care how you spell it.

He's lived here on and off for more than two decades. He used to command the operational forces at Hurlburt Field about a mile away. These days, among other things, he is the major domo of the fraternal Air Commando Association, made up of ex-Air Force covert operatives like himself.

At age 67, his blue eyes alternately twinkle and pierce as he agrees he has done a lot of things in his life, a lot of them secret, some for the Central Intelligence Agency, but insists — despite persistent reports to the contrary — that he has not participated in what has come to be called the Iran-contra affair.

"They never came to me," he says. "If they had, I would have. . . . I doubt if any one of our 2,000 members wouldn't have volunteered for that mission in supplying the contras." A moment later, he adds, ruefully, "Now that they know how — up it was, probably not."

Back in the days when he was running the secret American air war in Laos, General Aderholt was a legend, a no-nonsense officer who ruffled feathers but got things done even if he had to cut a few corners. Even now, some of his exploits are only whispered about by old Asia hands.

But it's Hienie's boys people are talking about these days, and not in whispers. A number of the men he trained and worked with have been swept up in the deepening Iran-contra scandal, men who — if his denials are to be believed — figured they could run this operation without him.

They are men like him, though, fervently pro-contra, strong believers in the ability of a guerrilla force to succeed, impatient with those he calls "peaceniks," and — he would be the last to deny it — private businessmen who learned in the service how to get things from here to there.

Hienie's boys, not the same ones, are in Fort Walton Beach, too. He stepped down as president of the Air Commando Association a few months ago. His success-

### A LETTER FROM FORT WALTON BEACH

sor, Charles E. Keeler, is the city manager, before that the police chief. His old exec in Thailand, Charles S. Hicks, is the executive secretary and treasurer of the association.

"It's sort of like one big family, everybody's close," the general says. "I was sort of like their brother, or their daddy."

The community itself, part of a string of small towns serving massive Eglin Air Force Base and the smaller Hurlburt Field, has a decidedly military flavor, his kind of town. Many of the restaurants, for example, require "proper attire," but, judging from a recent visit, that includes fatigues.

The T-shirts on display at a local convenience store reinforce the macho image. One says, "Have a nice day, turkey," another, "I don't fight anymore, I'm trained to kill," a third, "Terrorist-buster."

Nearby Eglin, moreover, reportedly was the site at which the first group of Nicaraguan contras was trained late last year, after Congress, under pressure from President Reagan, agreed to resume military aid to the anti-Sandinista rebels.

That news led to some small protest demonstrations in December. Still, says Mayor John L. Shortall Jr., a West Point graduate, "It appears we must help the freedom fighters. . . . If this facility [Eglin] is one that should be used, then go ahead." He adds, "This community is very imbued with patriotism."

General Aderholt's furniture store, along the heavily commercialized Miracle Strip Parkway that parallels the Gulf of Mexico beaches about a mile away, is called Far East Imports. "Condo Packages, \$1799.00, We Will Not Be Undersold," says a sign on the wall.

At one end of the store, there is a small, cluttered room, usually smoky, that serves as the headquarters of the Air Commando Association. There's a map of Central America on the wall and a khaki T-shirt that bears the motto of the Air Commandos, "Any time, Any place."

The general holds court here, and does what he does, which is a bit of everything. The rattan furniture, it turns out, is not the extent of his commercial activities. He is, he says, the president of Alkemal America, the U.S. affiliate of a Bangkok trading company with offices in 18 countries.

What does the company do? Recently he says, he got a call from someone who wanted his help in purchasing a squadron of Northrop F-5 supersonic fighter planes but who backed off when the general wanted to know what country they were going to.

Just the other day, Alkemal America's parent company in Bangkok called to see whether he could supply 20,000 tons of scrap metal a month. He said he'd check it out.

"We get calls for everything under the sun," he says. The bizarre request is nothing new. Just after he got out of the service in the mid-1970s, he ferried 200 billy goats by plane from Bombay to the Middle East, he says. He once had a contract to provide several million eggs to Iraq.

For the last few years, the Air Commando Association, under General Aderholt's guidance, has been involved in shipping privately donated medicine, medical supplies, food and clothing to refugees in, initially, El Salvador, then later, Guatemala.

He's planning a new program in which he will send clothing and other humanitarian assistance to refugee camps in Honduras, Nicaragua's northern neighbor, knowing full well that some of the aid may wind up with the contras, most of whom operate from Honduran bases.

"I can't deny some might get diverted to the contras," he says.

The Guatemalan aid program has been controversial. Much of the medicine, which he says comes from pharmaceutical companies and doctors' samples, has passed its expiration date.

"We get accused of everything, shipping out-of-date medicine, medicine that kills people," he says. "There's no way a vitamin can be bad. It may lose some of its strength. The same with aspirin and painkillers."

To make sure there's no danger, he says, the Air Commandos ship out-of-date medicines only to organizations that have a physician on staff.

The program has also been controversial because some critics have viewed it as helping to prop up the military government of Gen. Oscar Mejia Victores, though that government presided over the peaceful transition to civilian rule about a year ago.

These days, General Aderholt is trying to sell the U.S. government on a small rotor-driven aircraft to patrol the border with Mexico. In fact, he has a package deal up his sleeve. Not only will he want to supply the planes, but he'll man them, too, a kind of private border patrol.

"I'd like to do the job for them," he says.

He does not deny the connections to the Iran-contra players. In fact, he happily enumerates them. He seems to know all the key players and has been closely associated over the years, almost a godfather, to some by virtue of his military service in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

His relationship is closest with retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, a former aide who has been portrayed by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence as a central figure in both the Iranian arms sales and the fund diversions.



TRACY WENZEL

HARRY C. ADERHOLT

"I think he's a patriot," he says of General Secord, his old executive officer whom he has spoken to a number of times since the Iran-contra scandal broke. "I said, 'Dick, did you dishonor yourself?' He said, 'No.'" But, he adds, "Dick was making money."

General Aderholt also keeps in touch with Robert Dutton and, to a lesser extent, Richard Gadd, retired Air Force colonels who allegedly were involved with General Secord in the private contra aid network. All are active members of the Air Commando Association, he says.

Another old friend is John Singlaub, the retired Army lieutenant general who runs a private contra aid network and who has worked closely with Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, who allegedly ran the Iran-contra scheme out of the White House.

The two men met in Saigon more than 20 years ago, in 1966, when General Singlaub was running covert operations out of the Vietnamese capital and General Aderholt was his deputy. Since then, they have been affiliated in a number of private organizations, and probably see each other about once every two months.

Mr. Timberg is The Sun's White House correspondent.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/19 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000706730001-1